




Get two issues of Forbes for FREE!

Log in | Sign up | Connect    | Help**Lynda Gratton**, Contributor

I write about the future of work

[+ Follow](#) (18)

LEADERSHIP | 6/06/2013 @ 9:21AM | 2,697 views

The Three Paradoxes Of Generation Y

[+ Comment Now](#) [+ Follow Comments](#)

Over the last few weeks, I've noticed a considerable amount of attention focused on Generation Y from both the media and business world. The May 20 issue of [Time Magazine](#) led with a cover story labelling them the 'Me, Me, Me' generation: narcissistic, fame-obsessed, and self interested; Meanwhile [PwC](#) reported findings from a comprehensive [Next Gen](#) study of its Gen Y employees – a cohort that will make up around 80% of its workforce within the next three years.

This recent focus on Gen Y reflects a building sense of nervousness around how this generation, the biggest since the Baby Boomers, will reshape work. It's a nervousness I've felt from the HR leaders in my executive programme at LBS who often despair that this generation just aren't accepting 'the way things are done around here,' and are instead challenging long-standing processes and practices.



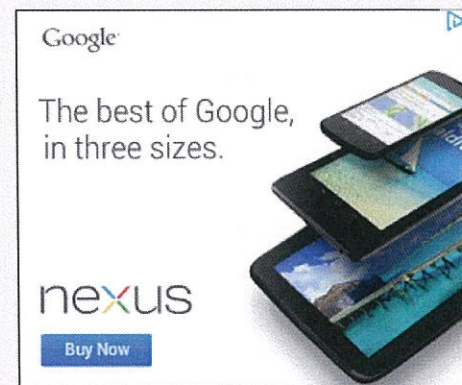
Reinventing The Corporation

**Lynda Gratton**
Contributor

But is this anxiety justified? Are Gen Y really so different from their predecessors? And, if they are, do organisations need to change to accommodate them?

Here are three paradoxes I've uncovered that can help us answer those questions.

Short-term focus, but equally committed – Gen Y are fast movers. We know they will change jobs, and perhaps even entire careers, many times in their long working lives. This is a stark contrast



Most Read on Forbes

[NEWS](#) [People](#) [Places](#) [Companies](#)

Never Give Stores Your ZIP Code. Here's Why +264,956 views

7 Reasons I Dumped Facebook
+108,560 views

Microsoft To Reverse Xbox One Policies After Fan Revolt +49,998 views

Class-Action Lawyers Lose Big At Supreme Court With American Express Case +41,623 views

Links 20 June: Microsoft's Xbox One Retreat And The Value Of Competition
+36,858 views

[+ show more](#)**Lynda Gratton**

Contributor

[+ Follow](#) (18)

I am a Professor of Management Practice at London Business School and the founder of the Hot Spots Movement. I have written six books including 'Living Strategy', 'Hot Spots' and 'Glow' and many articles including articles for the FT, The Wall Street Journal, Harvard Business Review and the MIT Sloan Business Review. My latest book 'The Shift' –

[+ show more](#)

The author is a Forbes contributor. The opinions expressed are those of the writer.



Restoring Faith in Leadership

Lynda Gratton
Contributor

with the 'job for life' career pattern of their Baby Boomer parents, and the HR leaders at my executive programme. It also shows their desire for meaningful, stimulating work from day one, and their lack of interest in traditional career paths that promote slowly.

This focus on short-term success is sometimes used to depict Gen Y as less committed to work than their Gen X and Baby Boomer peers. Yet this stereotype

is certainly not true of those surveyed in the [Next Gen](#) study. According to [Dennis Finn](#), Global Human Capital Leader at PwC, 'this generation is as engaged, committed and prepared to work as hard as previous generations'. They don't mind working. They just think there are better ways to work.

Tech savvy, but value face-to-face - Gen Y is known for its intensive use of social media and virtual communication. In the USA, this generation send and receive around 88 texts a day according to research by [Pew](#), and 70% check their phones every hour. With these statistics in hand it's easy to view this generation as happy to conduct their lives, both professional and private, exclusively through their phones, iPads and laptops. But PwC's research tells us that Gen Y's aptitude for electronic communication augments rather than replaces face-to-face interaction. Particularly when it comes to performance and career discussions where personal interactions are still the preferred method.

Require recognition, but not necessarily more trophies - Time Magazine rather negatively dubs Gen Y the 'trophy generation' who, as a result of receiving too many participation trophies as children, have a sense of entitlement far beyond that of their older peers. It's easy to see where this assumption comes from. Just look at games such as Call of Duty and World of Warcraft, which provide satisfying rewards for every action the player takes. So, it should come as no surprise that, according to a study cited by Time Magazine, 40% of Gen Y believes they should be promoted every two years, regardless of performance.

But again, this may be misinterpreting the issue. We know Gen Y place an real emphasis on continual learning, and the drive for regular promotion should not be confused with the desire for regular feedback, which many see as a vital part of their personal and career development. Though a visual indicator of progression, promotion does not always bring with it greater learning opportunities.

So, what do organisations do about these paradoxes and how can they truly understand what drives their Gen Ys? PwC's Next Gen report has a few recommendations, but one stands out to me as particularly important for this fast-moving, tech-savvy group: 'Invest time, resources and energy to listen and stay connected with your people'. If there's one thing we know for sure about this generation, it's that they like to have their voices heard, and to feel empowered. Whether in the virtual or real world, perhaps the key to understanding this generation and knowing how to engage them is to simply listen to them.

Many of the insights from PwC's NextGen study came out of Hot Spots Movement FoWlab jam methodology. Have a look at

LYNDA GRATTON'S POPULAR POSTS

[The 10 Ways to Future-Proof Your Career](#)

8,441 views

[The Three Big Mistakes That Will Stop You from Building a Future-Proofed Career](#)

3,025 views

[The Three Paradoxes Of Generation Y](#)

2,697 views

[Five Trends Shaping China's Human Capital Future](#)

1,174 views

[Are You an Adult at Work?](#)

1,074 views

MORE FROM LYNDA GRATTON

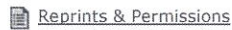


our [website](#) to find out more.

See Also:

- [Employee Management Tips](#)
- [Career Advice for Students](#)
- [Employee Retention Plans](#)
- [Sample Business Plans](#)
- [Entry Level Jobs](#)
- [Innovative Business Ideas](#)
- [Best Places to Work](#)
- [Alternative Career Options](#)

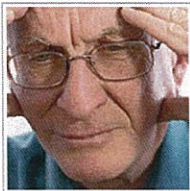
+ [Comment Now](#) + [Follow Comments](#)



From Around the Web



How Penny Stocks
Create Millionaires
Every Day



5 Dumb Mistakes
That Will Destroy
Your Retirement



How New iPads are
Selling for Under \$40



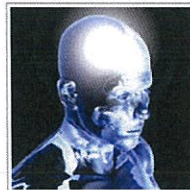
Tricks Car Insurance
Agents Don't Want
You to Know



Why Snoring Can Kill
- and How to Stop It



How Cruise Lines Fill
All Those Unsold
Cruise Cabins



How to Exercise Your
Brain to Make It
Strong



How to Speed Up
Your PC - Tricks
Manufacturers Hate



ADVERTISER VIDEO

